

In Heart of Seoul, an Unwanted U.S. Presence

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SEOUL, South Korea, Aug. 13 — In the center of this crowded city lies a green expanse of rolling hills, complete with split-level homes, baseball diamonds and 18-hole golf course. It is Yongsan, the United States military base that for many South Koreans has become a nagging symbol of the dominant American presence here.

Now, in a bow to Korean national pride, the United States and South Korean Governments have agreed in principle to move the base from the center of Seoul.

Lee Soo Jung, chief spokesman for

President Roh Tae Woo, told Korean reporters that President Roh raised the issue after he took office Feb. 25 and discussed it with Secretary of Defense Frank C. Carlucci and Secretary of State George P. Shultz when they visited Seoul in June and July.

"The U.S. side agreed to consider the matter affirmatively, and there have been a series of high and working-level talks between the two countries," he said.

Officials are continuing talks on such issues as who will pay for the move, and when the move will take place. Mr. Lee said the Korean Government wants to move nonmilitary installa-

tions such as the golf course and the baseball grounds as soon as possible and turn them into a park for citizens of Seoul. Other installations would be moved over the long term.

Yongsan, or Dragon Mountain, was a suburb of Seoul when the American military took over the former Japanese military headquarters at the end of World War II. But now the 699 acres of Yongsan form the one undeveloped patch in the center of a city bursting at the seams, blaring with the sound of horns and the boom of construction.

42,000 U.S. Troops

The base houses the military head-

quarters of the 42,000 troops stationed in South Korea. Driving into the South Post Gate, site of the base's homes and recreational area, is a trip out of South Korea and into American suburbia.

The base houses an elementary school, high school and radio and television station as well as offices for several military commands, including the United States Forces in Korea, the Eighth Army, the United States Naval Headquarters, and the combined Republic of Korea-United States Forces Command. Many American Embassy staff also live in the compound.

"People call it the boulder in the middle of Seoul," said Bill Fullerton, a spokesman for the United States Forces Korea Command who said the command had no information about moving the base. "We stand out — that's the complaint."

Outside the base is the lively, raunchy Itaewon section, crammed with American fast food stores, discount clothing and shoe stores, and bars. Just a week ago, American soldiers beat two Korean employees of an Itaewon night club in a fight that broke out after the employees refused to admit a woman with the soldiers who was carrying a dog.

After dark at Yongsan Station, prostitutes line the streets, tugging on the arms of men passing by.

A Humiliating Reminder

With the coming of the Seoul Olympics this September, a time when South Korea can showcase its extraordinary economic growth, many Koreans find Yongsan a humiliating reminder of the days when the United States loomed at the center of everything — politics, de-

fense, culture.

"I am for American troops being in Korea, but it really disturbs me to have the base right in the middle of Seoul," said K. S. Shim, a 32-year-old salesman. "I live next to the Eighth Army base, and I would like to see it changed into a park which could be used as a living space for the people of Seoul."

Although South Korean students are calling for the withdrawal of American troops as a prelude to eventual reunification with North Korea, most Koreans, like Mr. Shim, would prefer to see the troops stay for now.

The Americans occupy the base rent-free. A Foreign Ministry official who asked to remain anonymous said the United States wants the South Korean Government to pay, but Seoul believes that Washington should assume at least part of the cost.

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